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MARK RUTHERFORD

WILLARD LEAROYD SPERRY

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

"We shall read today in the Book of Experience." These words of Bernard of Clairvaux serve well as an adequate preface to the six short novels by "Mark Rutherford," which constitute an important contribution to the intimate religious literature of the last century. For, although cast in the form of fiction, these narratives clearly belong to that comparatively small class of inevitable and significant works which are best described as "confessional." Indeed, neither the form of the books, nor the shelter sought behind his now familiar pseudonym, served long to conceal the identity of the author, or to divert attention from the autobiographical aspects of his works.¹

William Hale White was born in Bedford, England, in 1831 and died in March, 1913. In this Midland stronghold of Dissent his father was a printer and bookseller, and a member in good and regular standing of the Independent Meeting founded by John Bunyan. "The recollections of boyhood, so far as week days go, are very happy. Sunday, however, was not happy." The lad seems to have lived for the six days a healthy, natural life; but the seventh day proved, alas! that he was "not one of God's children, like Samuel, who ministered before

¹ Autobiography of Mark Rutherford, 1881. Mark Rutherford's Deliverance, 1881. The Ethic of Benedict Spinoza, translated by William Hale White, 1883. The Revolution in Tanner's Lane, 1887. Miriam's Schooling, 1890. Catherine Furze, 1893. Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione et de Via, Benedict Spinoza, translated by William Hale White, 1895. Clara Hopgood, 1896. A Description of the Wordsworth and Coleridge Manuscripts in the Possession of Mr. T. Norton Longman, 1897. An Examination of a Charge of Apostasy against Wordsworth, 1898. Pages from a Journal and Other Papers, 1901. John Bunyan, 1905.

the Lord girded with a linen ephod." When he was fourteen or fifteen, however, he became entangled in the religious conventions of his time, was "converted," and in due season "admitted" to Bunyan Meeting. "Then came the great event and the great blunder" of his life. He decided to enter the ministry; not because of any prophetic burden or any apostolic woe, but rather because that way lay the path of least resistance. Incidentally this choice was very gratifying to his mother, "who was a little weak in her preference for people who did not stand behind counters." After six years of perfunctory preparation for his calling, Hale White passed through a genuine spiritual awakening. He was at that time a student in New College, St. John's Wood. His new experience led him to seek fresh interpretations of experience, and he soon fell under suspicion for his radical views and independent spirit and was summarily expelled from the College. In this extremity he appealed for moral support to the Reverend John Jukes, pastor of Bunyan Meeting; but the Reverend John being prudently orthodox and quite unwilling to compromise his comfortable position by befriending heretics, refused the desired aid. Hale White then drifted to London, where he obtained temporary work under John Chapman, editor of the *Westminster Review*. It was here, at 142 Strand, that he had his brief memorable fellowship with George Eliot, who reappears in his first book as "Theresa Wollaston." Subsequently he became London correspondent for two provincial papers, and finally obtained a position in the Admiralty, which he held until his retirement, late in life. For those intent upon discerning the precise line between fact and fiction in his books, the few autobiographical notes written in 1909 for his immediate family and since published as *The Early Life of Mark Rutherford*, are an indispensable guide. But, as he himself says in the beginning of this slight volume, most

of its record "has been told before in a semi-transparent disguise"; and it is in his disguises that William Hale White has spoken most directly and most intimately of his religious experience.

The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford appeared in 1881. In its general outline it is the story of the writer's own life up to the time he left the *Westminster Review*. It was written thirty years after the last of the events which it narrates, yet while those events still belonged to the writer's present consciousness. "I have been accused of secrecy and reserve. The real truth is, that nobody more than myself could desire self-revelation." The long interval of silence quickened, almost unnaturally, his powers of introspection and delineation. When finally the book appeared, in unpretentious paper binding, as an inevitable outcome of the imperative need for self-expression, it was, in its sincerity and poignancy, a modern Jeremiad. His early experience "had been shut up in his heart as a burning fire, and he was weary with forbearing and he could not stay." Such then is this record of one born into a world of "rigid Calvinistic Independents," brought up in an atmosphere of spiritual unreality, sent to a theological college to fit himself for the ministry in which he was "to meet the doubts of the nineteenth century; to be the guide of men; to advise them in their perplexities; to suppress their tempestuous lusts; to lead them heavenward." There he listened to countless lectures "as irrelevant as the chattering of sparrows," there he was girded with those weapons of dogma by which he was to achieve "a triumphant refutation of the sceptic and the shallow infidel," weapons which in the thick of the fight he found to be "mere swords of lath." Because, in the face of such a perfunctory process, he attempted to work out his own salvation, it was suspected that he "did not rest in the simplicity of the gospel" and was not content with "a repetition of the old,

old story; of which, Mr. Rutherford, you know we ought never to get weary." Leaving the school under official disfavor, he put through two brief, unhappy pastorates; first over an orthodox congregation where a few prosaic souls mechanically reiterated the five points of Calvinism, and then in a Unitarian chapel, "where a few descendants of the eighteenth century heretics still testified against three Gods in one." One after another the articles of his inherited faith became incredible and were renounced. "Nakeder and nakeder had I become with the passage of the years, and I trembled to anticipate the complete emptiness to which, before long, I should be reduced." His only human fellowship in those dreary days he found with the "Republican atheist," Mardon, and his daughter Mary. Wearying finally with a message of negations, which he knew to be joyless and unprofitable, he left the ministry and took up literary work in London, only to discover new and unsuspected capacities for failure and to end in utter self-contempt. From such desperate self-loathing he had been in part rescued by Theresa, when he was suddenly summoned to Mardon's death-bed.

"All that night Mary and I watched in that topmost garret looking out over the ocean. It was a night entirely unclouded and the moon was at the full. Towards daybreak her father moaned a little, then became quiet, and just as dawn was changing to sunrise he passed away. . . . I went back to London. Before I had gone twenty miles on my journey the glory of a few hours before had turned into autumn storm. The rain came down in torrents, and the wind rushed across the country in great blasts, stripping the trees and driving over the sky with hurricane speed great masses of continuous cloud, which mingled earth and heaven. I thought of all the ships which were on the sea in the night, sailing under the serene stars which I had seen rise and set; I thought of Mardon, lying dead, and I thought of Mary. The simultaneous passage through great emotions welds souls, and begets the strongest of all forms of love. Those who have sobbed together over a dead friend, who have held one

another's hand in that dread hour, feel a bond of sympathy, pure and sacred, which nothing can dissolve."

Here *The Autobiography* ends. His friend and editor, "Reuben Shapcott," says of him in a postscript that at this time Mark Rutherford passed through a crisis which issued in better things. "Something happened, . . . there was some recoil, some healthy horror of eclipse in this self-created gloom, which drove him out of it. . . . He was content to rest and wait."

In *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* (1881) the narrative is resumed. We find him as a city correspondent for country journals and as a clerk in the Borough. The trite euphemisms of arm-chair philosophers about the joy of work had no meaning for him, and in his sordid, monotonous tasks he was forced to "arch his back to bear his burden and find some compensation elsewhere." As the earlier book was the record of his spiritual negations, so this second book is the record of his first tentative affirmations. The quest for positive values was not wholly vain. He found a friend, M'Kay, and they two found a few other friends, a coal-porter, a copying clerk, a waiter, obscure souls "whom the world had crushed out of all shape." These all met Sunday afternoons and painfully fashioned their "Drury Lane theology," a very meagre theory of faith and practice with only two or three articles, "not thirty-nine, nor, alas! a third of that number," but yet a creed to live by. They achieved not merely the Stoic power to endure, but even some measure of contentment with their lot. Then came Mark Rutherford's sudden meeting and as sudden marriage with Ellen, whom he had forsaken in the old days, and who like himself now came to the meeting out of great tribulation. *The Deliverance* ends with another of those strangely moving, impressionistic passages by which Mark Rutherford so skilfully conveys

the suggestion of "something far more deeply inter-fused." With Ellen he leaves London for his one holiday in all the year and goes down to the sea-shore.

"We had a wonderful time. . . . We brought our food with us, and sat upon the shore in the shadow of a piece of the cliff. A row of heavy white clouds lay along the horizon almost unchangeable and immovable. . . . The level opaline water differed from a floor by a scarcely perceptible heaving motion, which broke into the faintest ripples at our feet. So still was the great ocean, so quietly did everything lie in it, that the wavelets which licked the beach were as pure and bright as if they were part of the mid-ocean depths. About a mile from us, at one o'clock, a long row of porpoises appeared, showing themselves in graceful curves for an hour or so, till they went out farther to sea off Fairlight. Some fishing boats were becalmed just in front of us. Their shadows slept, or almost slept, upon the water, a gentle quivering alone showing that it was not complete sleep, or if sleep that it was sleep with dreams. The intensity of the sunlight sharpened the outlines of every little piece of rock and of the pebbles, in a manner which seemed supernatural to us Londoners. . . . It was perfect—perfect in its beauty—and perfect because, from the sun in the heavens down to the fly with burnished wings on the hot rock, there was nothing out of harmony. Everything breathed one spirit. Ellen and I sat still, doing nothing. We wanted nothing, we had nothing to achieve. No reminiscences, no anticipations disturbed us; the present was sufficient and occupied us entirely."

"A month later," says the brief editorial footnote, "my friend was dead and buried." The task of self-revelation was ended.

These first two books are unquestionably the most perfect of all. They were fashioned out of the heat of early feeling, made triply intense by long years of self-suppression and silence—a feeling which Mark Rutherford was much too sincere to feign in after-years. And yet the volumes which follow, though less compelling and less beautiful, are in their own way quite as significant. Having satisfied the need for self-expression, Mark Rutherford was able to turn from an intensely

subjective report of his experience to an impersonal, objective criticism of that experience. In his third novel, *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane* (1887), he takes his stand outside himself and his early world and attempts to estimate the values of his inherited faith and practice. The story of Zachariah Coleman, stanch Republican and orthodox Calvinist, gives the author ample opportunity to appraise Calvinism fairly, and to discuss in the terms of a single experience that momentous change in the Christianity of the nineteenth century by which "the man rose up behind the Calvinist." Then follow three other short novels, each of them taking its name from the woman whose spiritual discipline and development it recounts: *Miriam's Schooling* (1890), *Catherine Furze* (1893), and *Clara Hopgood* (1896). While no longer parochial in their problems or theological in their content, these narratives are still predominantly religious. With Calvinism left far behind as an incredible system, Mark Rutherford here undertakes the rehabilitation of old dogmas in new forms. In the interesting stories of these women we find the few needful but sufficient intimations of the larger spiritual affirmations of a mature experience.

The wealth of material and the charm of style of these six books makes any adequate critique difficult. Merely as a writer of English prose, Mark Rutherford has won a place with the masters of that art. His books are short, the best of them scarcely over a hundred pages—a welcome respite from the tediously prolonged meanderings of the contemporary psychological novel. He has a marvellous clarity of style, a simplicity and a directness, which are the fruits of a sincere nature schooled by hard experience to direct speech. His own canons for style are given us in his description of Mary Mardon: "There was no sort of effort or strain in anything she said, no attempt by emphasis to make up for weakness of thought,

and no compliance with that vulgar and most disagreeable habit of using intense language to describe what is not intense in itself." He must have followed all his life the advice which he received from his plain-spoken father: "If you write anything you consider particularly fine, strike it out!" As a stylist, Mark Rutherford is to be judged and justified by the argument from silence. The books which he might have written but did not write, give to the brief books he did write their abiding literary excellence.

It is not as a writer of high prose that Mark Rutherford will live, however, for his themes and not his treatment of those themes give to his work its perennial interest. He is, by his own right, the spokesman for mid-Victorian Independency, a world which without his witness would have been mute and perhaps ultimately forgotten. He has done for the humble Non-conformity of his own Midland counties what Trollope did for the Establishment in sleepy cathedral towns, what George Eliot did for Methodism through the country-side, and what Jane Austen and Miss Mitford did for innocuous gentility at large. "Cowfold" is the "Barchester" of Dissent. "Would that the present historian could bring back one blue summer morning, one afternoon and evening, and reproduce exactly what happened in Cowfold square, in one of the Cowfold shops, in one of the Cowfold parlours, and in one Cowfold heart and brain." The deed fulfilled the wish. Mark Rutherford knew with Emerson that "every man can live all history in his own person," and he set himself seriously to interpret the universal human interest and the deep significance of humble events in obscure places. "The garden of Eden, the murder of Cain, the deluge, the salvation of Noah, the exodus from Egypt, David and Bathsheba, with the murder of Uriah, the Assyrian invasion, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the

Resurrection from the Dead; to say nothing of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, the tragedy of Count Cenci, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, the Inquisition in Spain, and the revolt of the Netherlands, all happened in Cowfold, as well as elsewhere, and were perhaps more interesting there because they could be studied in detail and the records were authentic." He writes like the poet Gray, revealing the universal value and meaning of some particular provincial "village Hampden" or "mute inglorious Milton."

Often he bids us laugh at the quaint contradictions of his world, that world which Kingsley once called, in happy paradox, "Orthodox Dissent." If Bergson be right, that humor springs to birth where free agents act mechanically, then there is a wealth of humor in the lives of these folk of Cowfold—Nonconformists who mechanically conformed to their own self-imposed conventions. What liturgy ever mumbled from a book could be more conventional than the "long prayer . . . which generally began with a confession that we were all sinners, but no individual sins were ever confessed; and then ensued a kind of dialogue with God, very much resembling the speeches which in later years I have heard in the House of Commons from the movers and seconders of addresses to the Crown at the opening of Parliament." When did the ancient Nonconformist liberty of prophesying ever degenerate into such dreary repetition of uninspired theological platitude as in these days of which we read? "The minister invariably began with the fall of man, propounding the scheme of redemption, and ended by depicting in the morning the blessedness of the saints and in the evening the doom of the lost. There was a tradition that in the morning there should be 'experience,' that is to say, comfort for the elect, and that the evening should be appropriated to their less fortunate brethren."

And how the conventions of this lean ecclesiasticism were reflected in the social usages of these communities! Again and again, as one reads, it is to laugh, not with Gargantuan laughter which spends itself in one noisy outbreak, but rather with the quiet smile of the “Comic Muse, grave and sisterly,” who, looking upon this world, “compresses her lips.” Who but the simpering deacon of Water Lane Chapel, Mr. Snale, would object to the *Book of Martyrs* because, “although Mr. Fox might be a very good man, and was a converted character, yet he did not, you know, Mr. Rutherford, belong to *us*”! What depths of parsimony in the single phrase “potatoes or cabbage,” by which the meagre options of the Sunday dinner are presented! What nice caste-systems, more rigid than any of the godless East, are found in these Dissenting towns! Woe to him who overstepped the boundaries of his particular communion, that rare intrepid soul “who preferred tea with some taste in it from a Unitarian, to the insipid wood-flavoured stuff sold by the grocer who believed in the Trinity”!

And then how the genial laughter of comedy becomes occasionally the hard laughter of satire, which Meredith says is like “a blow in the back or the face”! There was the Reverend John Broad, who after his three sermons on Sunday “always professed himself a little ‘Mondayish.’” This humor turns bitter and merciless, a scathing criticism of the moral impotence of decaying Calvinism, as we are introduced to Thomas Broad, supposedly “the child of pious parents and of many prayers, who had not been exposed to those assaults of the enemy of souls which beset ordinary young men,” but actually “a brazen red-hot idol” of coarse passions, whose cadish deeds stand out in ugly relief against his father’s efforts “to improve Thomas where he was weakest, that is to say, Systematic Theology, and more particularly in the Doctrine of the Comforter.” This was Mark

Rutherford's great criticism of Calvinism, made frankly in his first book: "It is remarkable that the scheme was never of the slightest service to me in repressing one solitary evil inclination." All the bitterness of personal protest against the inconsistencies and insufficiencies of that system as he knew it, are summed up in the superb irony of that unforgettable chapter on Romans 8 7, a passage almost unrivalled in English fiction. We listen to Thomas Broad's first sermon, his sermon upon "the carnal mind." We hear the judgment of a fellow-theologue that "it would be better in the future to be a little simpler and to avoid what may be called the metaphysics of the Redemption." We see Thomas, himself "Mondayish" like his reverend father, calling upon Pauline, and then coarsely tampering with the sanctities of her clean person. We see her mark him with a mark like the brand of Cain. And, then inconveniently bandaged but unabashed, we see him in his pulpit on the following Sunday. "He had struck out the metaphysics and put in a new head—'Neither indeed *can* be.' The Apostle did not merely state a fact that the carnal mind was not subject to the law of God; he said, 'Neither indeed can be!' Mark, my brethren, the force of the *neither can.*"

Yet both the thoughtful smile of quiet humor and the merciless laughter of cruel satire are merely foils to the serious purpose of these books. Great as is their human and antiquarian interest, valuable as they are already becoming as first-hand documents from an era that has closed, these books are of greater moment as the records of intimate individual experience. Each of them tells of the struggle of some one soul to work out his own salvation. A process of natural selection, therefore, must always determine the readers for whom Mark Rutherford really writes. Those to whom orthodoxy is precious for its own sake will find him disquieting. Those who are dogmatically committed to a religion of healthy-

mindedness will find these narratives depressing, if not unintelligible, for they tell of sick souls. Those who demand a complete and consistent system of thought will find our author disappointing, for he abandoned such a system and never found a substitute. To those who thrive only upon some new thing these books will be stale and unprofitable, for they have only the oldest and most hackneyed philosophy of life, and one can "discover" Mark Rutherford only as he discovers the book of Job, that is, for himself. "The persons who to me have proved attractive," he says, and his readers are determined by these words, "are those who have passed through such a process as that through which I myself passed." These are the persons to whom the riddle of existence is an imperative problem; persons who are compelled alike by temperament and circumstance to wrestle with life until it yields, if not a clear meaning, at least some measure of blessing; persons to whom religion and love more than all other human interests give, if not a final answer to life's problems, at least a valid working hypothesis. To all such persons Mark Rutherford speaks with authority and not as the scribes of nineteenth-century literature.

By his own confession he writes of "commonplace lives." But the word "common" falls from Mark Rutherford's lips, not with the suggestion of worthlessness, but rather with the intimation of those deeper values which Wordsworth gave it when he spoke of "the common heart of man." In his own words, he had found "that what is commonplace is true." These characters of his, he goes on to say, will be "disappointing to persons who prefer men and women of linear magnitude to those of three dimensions." After the manner of the world they live narrow circumscribed lives, utterly devoid of broadening circumstance. There is here no familiarity with the affairs of state or society that the

worldling should enjoy the fellowship of these obscure souls. But the negligible first dimensions of character serve to set in bolder outline the heights and depths of spiritual experience, of which even the most commonplace are capable. Mark Rutherford has deliberately chosen not to confuse the issues or confound the values of his work by introducing the world's standards of greatness. For he tells us, not how men go abroad through the kingdoms of this world, but how they go down into Hell and rise up to Heaven. These are the aspects of the "commonplace" which he portrays. The chapter on "Miss Arbour" is the classical instance of his ever-recurring thesis that beneath the dull surface of obscure lives there are unsuspected heights and depths. "Who would have dreamed that such tragic depths lay behind that serene face, and that her orderly precision was like the grass and flowers upon volcanic soil with Vesuvian fires slumbering below? I was taught, as I have been taught over and over again, that unknown abysses, into which the sun never shines, lie covered with commonplace in men and women, and are revealed only by the rarest opportunity."

Nor are these commonplace persons simple characters, to be easily classified by one or another of our familiar categories. The novels are written by one with a veritable genius for introspection, yet they seldom attempt any analysis of character. Mark Rutherford knows that our whole inward life, with its baffling impulses and contradictory ideas and unresolved aims, makes even the simplest of us a hopelessly involved being. So he says of Catherine, "It is vexatious that a complicated process in her should be represented by a single act which was transacted in a second. It would have been more intelligible if it could have written itself into a dramatic conversation extending over two or three pages; but as the event happened, so it must be recorded." How

refreshingly candid after the tedious and unconvincing character-studies of contemporary fiction!

Indeed Mark Rutherford cannot accept as valid the hard-worked modern categories of sincerity and insincerity, by which our nebulous contemporary theology would distinguish the saved from the lost. This familiar distinction suffered recent rebuke at the hands of Father Tyrrell, who wrote to Canon Lilley in one of his last letters, "As to the question, 'Are we honest?' I reply, indifferent honest. English John Bull speaks as though honesty were the simplest and most elementary of virtues, and not the very last quintessence of a noble character. . . . The honesty question always riles me." Mark Rutherford anticipated Father Tyrrell in his affirmation that sincerity is not an adequate and final substitute for orthodoxy. "I never, hardly, see a pure breed either of goat or sheep. I never see anybody who deserves to go straight to heaven or who deserves to go straight to hell. . . . There is no such thing as a human being simply hypocritical or simply sincere. We are all hypocrites more or less, in every word and every action, and, what is more, in every thought. It is a question simply of degree." Hence Mark Rutherford, like Browning, sees some measure of sincerity in the most patently inconsistent persons. The most despicable of all his characters, Rev. John Broad, was "a big, gross-feeding, heavy person with heavy ox-face and large mouth"; but "he was probably as sincere as his build of body and soul allowed him to be." Mr. Cardew, a refined and sensitive churchman, finds himself suddenly entangled in the meshes of illicit love, and so became one whom the world would call "a canting, hypocritical parson, a type not uncommon, described over and over again in novels, and thoroughly familiar to theatre-goers." Mark Rutherford knows otherwise: "The truth is that he did not cant and was not a hypocrite. . . . The accusation of

hypocrisy, if we mean lofty assertion and occasional and even conspicuous moral failure, may be brought against some of the greatest figures of history. Because David sinned with Bathsheba, and even murdered her husband, we do not discredit the sincerity of the Psalms." Mark Rutherford has no interest in lack-lustre, luke-warm souls, incapable of inconsistencies, but prefers to tell of men and women in the making, complex, passionate, and unresolved, only slowly bringing order out of the spiritual chaos of their human heritage.

The religious history of these commonplace yet intricate characters follows naturally, though not consciously or artificially, the general direction and stages of the "mystic way," which we are now rediscovering. Mark Rutherford himself, Zachariah Coleman, Miriam Tacchi, Catherine Furze, Clara Hopgood, belong to that goodly fellowship of souls who, in Saint Martin's phrase, "all speak the same language and come from the same country." They begin life with certain inherited creeds and institutions. For a time these external traditions of faith and practice suffice; but as the strain and stress of intimate experience increase, these second-hand solutions to first-hand problems no longer suffice. Such was Miriam's plight: "She was now face to face with a great trouble, and she had to encounter it alone, with no weapons and with no armour save that which Nature provides. She was not specially an exile from civilization; churches and philosophers had striven and demonstrated for thousands of years; yet she was no better protected than if Socrates, Epictetus, and all ecclesiastical institutions from the time of Moses had never existed."

All personal religion which is worthy of the name has its origin in some experience through which external tradition is replaced by immediate conviction. This is the time of the "soul's awakening." Coleridge understood the almost casual character of this event: "Awakened by

the cock-crow (a sermon, a calamity, a sick bed, or providential escape) the Christian pilgrim sets out in the morning twilight." Mark Rutherford understood, with Coleridge, that the immediate causes of this initial religious experience may be relatively trivial. Churches, theological colleges, systems of dogma, all had touched Mark Rutherford but had failed to wake him. Then one day, as he was going down his Damascus Road, he "happened to find amongst a parcel of books a volume of poems in paper boards. It was called 'Lyrical Ballads,' and I read first one and then the whole book. It conveyed to me no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the divine apparition. . . . Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every reformer has done; he recreated my Supreme Divinity." So Mark Rutherford writes of Miriam's new birth in a passage so intimate and so suggestive that a later novelist has built a whole story around its final sentences:

"What had she undergone? A little poverty, a little love-affair, a little sickness. . . . Miriam had a vitality, a susceptibility, or fluidity of character, call it what you will, which did not need great provocation. There are some mortals on this earth to whom nothing more than a summer morning very early, or a certain chance idea in a lane ages ago, or a certain glance from a fellow creature dead for years, has been the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, or the Descent of the Holy Ghost.

"A man now old and nearing his end is known to Miriam's biographer, who one Sunday November afternoon, when he was but twenty years old, met a woman in a London street and looked in her face. Neither he nor she stopped for an instant; he looked in her face, passed on and never saw her again. He married, had children, who now have children; but that woman's face has never left him, and the colours of the portrait which hangs in his soul's oratory are as vivid as ever. A thousand times he has appealed to it; a thousand times it has sat in judgement; and a thousand times has its sacred beauty redeemed him."

Mark Rutherford knows that it is not within our human power to determine the times and the seasons and the ways of the Spirit. The most insignificant happenings of the unanticipated hour may bring the soul to its rebirth, for sensitive souls are moulded by the slightest influences. "Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Then after the season of new birth, with its intimations of more abundant life, there follows the hard but inevitable time of readjustment, the period of "purgation." From the pleasure-state of its awakening, the soul swings over to the pains of renunciation. Augustine must loose his hold upon "the baggage of the world." Francis, gay, genial, romantic, must strip himself naked in the streets of Assisi. Antoinette Bourignan must cast away even the last single penny which she took with her that morning she renounced the world. The tale of these drastic denials of the creature is told again in Mark Rutherford's narratives. Miriam, Catherine, Clara, all make the great renunciation; they achieve the power of doing without that which they most desire.

The demands of this period are imperative and remorseless. There can be no temporizing, no compromise. Not that which is indifferently loved, but that which is most loved must be denied. The records of this time have been told fully and once for all in the incomparable *Confessions* of Augustine; yet in Mark Rutherford's account of his renunciation of his mistress, metaphysics, there is deep poignancy. By nature he was open to the seductions of speculation; "by a cruel destiny he was impelled to dabble in matters for which he was totally unfitted. . . . Just in proportion to his lack of penetrative power was his tendency to occupy himself with difficult questions." In passing through

his season of spiritual purging he was forced to turn his back upon this one interest, which above all others fascinated him and snared him. There are those to whom theological negation gives a kind of rude pleasure. In many respects Mark Rutherford's negations were not unlike those which Edmund Gosse has recorded in his *Father and Son*. But, unlike Gosse, Mark Rutherford tells the story with humility and pain and deep feeling for the tragic transition through which his time was passing. He could never be satisfied with Gosse's facile iconoclasm. To him the renunciation of old creeds and the casting off of outworn systems is a painful self-mutilation. Suso's self-appointed bodily mortifications were hardly more grievous than the spiritual discipline which Mark Rutherford accepted as his lot. He falls back again and again upon the familiar mystic symbols of nakedness and poverty when he seeks to describe the issues of this process. One after another he strips off the decent intellectual habiliments of his faith and stands finally naked before the world, overcome with "the feeling of my own worthlessness and the longing for death as the cancellation of the blunder of my existence."

The price of these negations was the greater because it was Mark Rutherford's lot to renounce one of the greatest intellectual systems which the mind of man has ever achieved. There is nothing facile in his denial of Calvinism, but everywhere a full and measured appreciation of its inherent credibility. "This at least must be said for Puritanism, that of all the theologies and philosophies, it is most honest in its recognition of the facts. . . . Even if Calvinism had been carved on tables of stone and handed down from Heaven by the Almighty Hand, it would not have lived if it had not been found to agree more or less with the facts. . . . I object to giving the name of Calvin to a philosophy which is a necessity in all ages. 'Are not two sparrows sold for

a farthing and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father.' This is the last word which can be said, and at times it is the only ground which does not shake under our feet."

The great renunciation asked of Mark Rutherford was, therefore, not that of a particular system, but of intellectualism as a whole. He never replaced Calvinism by any other and less consistent system; he simply issued from his period of negation in settled anti-intellectualism. His charge against Calvinism was unique in his own day, yet it anticipated something of the dominant temper of our day. Calvinism collapsed, not because it was unintellectual but because it was over-intellectual. When in later years he looks back upon those early unhappy days, he speaks of metaphysics as other saved men have spoken of the world, the flesh, and the devil. "I shun all those metaphysical speculations of former years as I would a path which leads to madness." He never even aspired to an answer to the riddle of the universe. He is content to place the most contradictory facts in juxtaposition, and to leave the Spirit, in fulfilment of the creative task, brooding over the paradoxical chaos of a pluralistic universe. "No theory of the world is possible. The storm, the rain slowly rotting the harvest, the children sickening in cellars, are obvious; but equally obvious are an evening in June, the delight of men and women in one another, in music, and in the exercise of thought." Mark Rutherford admits that there may be those gifted geniuses who can profitably occupy themselves with the effort to achieve an intellectual reconciliation between the contradictions of experience; but he has no fellowship with them. He much prefers the homely company of his own Zachariah and Pauline, lay, private persons, "happily for them committed to nothing, not subsidized by their reputations to defend a system."

The mystic period of negation has its own recompenses. In renouncing Calvinism, Mark Rutherford found Christianity. "The most desperate private experiences cannot go beyond the garden of Gethsemane," and at the very nadir of his world Mark Rutherford met Jesus. "The mere knowing that other people have been tried as we have been tried is a consolation to us. . . . In the worst maladies, the healing effect which is produced by the visit of a friend who can simply say, 'I have endured all that,' is most marked." So it was that Mark Rutherford discovered Jesus, not through a limited atonement or irresistible grace, but in "the fellowship of his sufferings." Jesus is not to him a "young Apollo," busied with glad affirmations of this present world, but the great World-Denier. One or two of his passages upon this central theme are prophetic of the interpretation of the gospel which the modern eschatological school is forcing upon contemporary theology. In one of the darkest hours of his life he sat and listened to Mary Mardon singing from "*The Messiah*" "He was despised and rejected."

"The song wound itself into the very centre of my existence. I seemed to be listening to the tragedy of all human worth and genius. . . . The song is potent, because with utmost musical tenderness and strength it reveals the secret of the influence of the story of Jesus. Nobody would be bold enough to cry, 'That too is my case'; and yet the poorest and humblest soul has a right to the consolation that Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. . . .

"The story of Jesus is the story of the poor and the forgotten. He is not the Saviour of the rich and prosperous, for they need no Saviour. The healthy, active, and well-to-do need Him not, and require nothing more than is given by their own health and prosperity. But every one who has walked in sadness because his destiny has not fitted his aspirations; every one who, having no opportunity to lift himself out of his narrow town- or village-circle of acquaintances, has thirsted for something beyond what they could give him; everybody who, with nothing but a daily round of mechanical routine before him, would welcome death if it were martyr-

dom for a cause; every humblest creature, in the obscurity of great cities or remote hamlets, who silently does his or her duty without recognition—all these turn to Jesus, and find themselves in Him."

Having thus come to himself and having found himself at deeper levels, Mark Rutherford passed at once from "The Everlasting Nay" into "The Everlasting Yea." He now sets himself resolutely to the task of affirmation, to the discovery and assertion of positive values in life. This is to be an intimate task; for a man's religion "is not something without any particular connection with him. It is the answer to questions which have been put to him, and not to those which have been put to other people." Moreover it must be a slow task; for "there is no remedy for our troubles which is uniformly and progressively efficacious. All that we have a right to expect from our religion is that gradually, very gradually, it will assist us to a real victory."

His first affirmations, "the compensations for life" he calls them, seem at first sight pitifully disproportionate to the need and sorry substitutes for the dogmatic values he had destroyed. Yet, if these early "compensations" are meagre in content, they are prophetic in spirit. As the moralists tell us that the size of a sin does not alter its inherent wickedness, so Mark Rutherford implies that the mere amount of some recompense for life does not affect its inherent worth. So, like the "Preacher" of old, he does not deprecate even the creature-pleasure of the passing moment. There is no realm of ends contemplated by the ancient injunction to eat one's bread with joy; yet the whole reaction to life implied in that bidding is positive, and warrants Mark Rutherford's exegetical comment that "happiness, if it does no mischief, is better than most spiritual misery." Then beyond the happiness of the moment there are those countless trivial avocations, our hobbies, by which we are

delivered from ourselves. The butterfly-catcher of *The Autobiography* is a spiritually constructive force in Mark Rutherford's world, and leads to the wise reflection that "men should not be too curious in analyzing and condemning any means which nature devises to save them from themselves, whether it be coins, old books, curiosities, butterflies, or fossils." Then, through these saving avocations, one rises to other and fuller compenses, those wide-spread and readily accessible intimations of the Infinite which will deliver even the most circumscribed life from its slavery to "the petty and personal." Everywhere the world of sordid particulars is pierced by "chinks through which to touch the universal." "The sea was a corrective to the littleness all round me." Even more than the sea the stars became the mediating symbol of the Infinite. How often, in one novel after another, does Mark Rutherford lift his eyes to the heavens at night and repeat the mystic affirmation, "All shall be well and all shall be well." "The provision in nature of infinity ever present to us is a great help. No man can look up to the stars at night and reflect upon them without feeling that the tyranny of sense is loosened, and the tyranny too of the conclusions of his logic. . . . I sought refuge in the idea of God, the God of a starry night with its incomprehensible distances; and I was at peace, content to be the meanest worm of all the millions that crawl on the earth."

So by the way of his "compensations" Mark Rutherford gets home again to God, and attempts his first conscious and deliberate religious affirmation. "I felt as if somehow, after many errors, I had once more gained a road, a religion in fact, and one which essentially was not new but old, the religion of the Reconciliation, the reconciliation of man with God. . . . This surely, under a thousand disguises, has been the meaning of all the forms of worship which we have seen in the world. . . . In my

younger days the aim of theologians was the justification of the ways of God to man. They could not succeed. They succeeded no better than ourselves in satisfying the intellect with a system. Nor does the Christian religion profess any such satisfaction. It teaches rather the great doctrine of a Remedy, of a Mediator; and therein it is profoundly true." Thus far did Mark Rutherford come in the *Deliverance*.

In the last three novels the problems of theology are supplanted by the problems of love, and the men give way to women. Yet in following the experiences of Miriam and Catherine and Clara, Mark Rutherford is still seeking under the guises of this human interest a further development of the religious consciousness. One who was so minded could plot the two curves of theology and love in these six books, and see how the spiritual mean remains constant. Two detached remarks in the earlier novels indicate the line along which the love-interest is to be developed. "Blessed is love; blessed is hate; but thrice accursed is that indifference which is neither one nor the other, the muddy mess which men call friendship." "Passion does not dawdle and compliment. It may devour and burn like a flame; and in a few moments, like flame, may bring down a temple to dust and ashes; but it is earnest as flame, and essentially pure." There are few writers who have drawn as nicely as Mark Rutherford the sharp line between passion which is clean and passion which is unclean. The vivid picture of Pauline Caillaud dancing in her attic tenement before her father and Zachariah, is marvellous alike for its freedom and its restraint. First and last he is an intense nominalist in his treatment of love. Catherine Furze loved Mr. Cardew: "But what is love? There is no such thing. There are loves, and they are all different." Baruch Cohen, a middle-aged widower, finds himself in love with Clara: "But it was

not Clara Hopgood who was before him; it was hair, lips, eyes, just as it was twenty years ago."

It is not with love as a physical experience, however, that Mark Rutherford is concerned, but rather with the struggle of naturally free souls to realize their freedom and find themselves through the human restraints and disappointments of the divine passion. His women all belong to one type. Theresa Wollaston, Pauline Cail-laud and her daughter Pauline Coleman after her, Miriam Tacchi, Catherine Furze, and Madge Hopgood, each of them in her particular environment was "like a wild sea-gull in a farm yard of peaceful, clucking, brown-speckled fowls." As the earlier books were studies in theological incompatibility, so the later books are studies in personal incompatibility, efforts to discover in the terms of the most intimate of all human relationships the ever needful "religion of Reconciliation."

In the earlier novels, where the theological interest predominates, the function of the women is clear and simple, they achieve the deliverance of the men from their spiritual bondage. Mark Rutherford begins where Goethe left off: "*Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan.*" Theresa and Pauline each "add one more beatitude to those in the gospels: 'Blessed are they who heal us of our self-despisings.'" In the later novels the immediate spiritual dilemmas of the women become paramount, and Mark Rutherford sets himself seriously to achieve for his heroines the deliverance and reconciliation which he had found for himself. In *Miriam's Schooling* the most untamed of all these women of "wild irregular genius" is reconciled to her plodding husband by the discovery that, although he had no soul for *Romeo and Juliet*, he could understand the movement of the heavenly bodies, which, for all her eager romanticism, she could not understand. With telescope and orrery

she became a novitiate at his feet. In this simple way she learned the first necessary lesson in the school of religious experience, the lesson of Humility. Through her broken and contrite pride, love came to its own.

In *Catherine Furze* the dilemma is yet more serious. Though it was altogether unlikely "in a sleepy midland town knowing nothing but the common respectabilities," the daughter of an ironmonger fell in love with a married clergyman. The trouble grew until one sultry afternoon they stood together by a riverside. "She loved this man; it was a perilous moment; one touch, a hair's breadth of oscillation, and the two would have been one." But in obedience to a something, that inhibition which in the perilous moment always saves Mark Rutherford's men and women, Catherine conquered herself and in so doing gave Cardew the power to conquer himself. He went back to his wife, and "no woman ever had a husband more tender or devoted than hers in those later years." When at last he came and knelt by Catherine's bedside as she was dying, he could only say, "You have saved me," and she whispered in reply, "You have saved me." "By their love for each other they were both saved. The disguises are manifold which the Immortal Son assumes in the work of our Redemption."

And finally in the last novel, *Clara Hopgood*, our dilemma has become veritable tragedy. Outraged respectability deplored this book when it appeared, because it told of Madge Hopgood's fall and her determined refusal of the conventional reprisal, marriage. But outraged respectability missed the whole content of this largest of the novels; for this is the story, not of Madge Hopgood's fall, but of Clara Hopgood's great renunciation, by which finally she transfers to her discredited sister a love that might have been her own, and so saves her sister by her vicarious sacrifice. She goes to Italy with Mazzini and dies there in the service of political

liberty, and one day long after, when her name was mentioned, Baruch said to Madge, "The theologians represent the Crucifixion as the most sublime fact in the world's history. It was sublime, but let us reverence also the Eternal Christ who is forever being crucified for our salvation." By these devious ways Mark Rutherford found again that "orthodoxy" which once he lost awhile. In *Clara Hopgood* "the wheel has come full circle."

Such are the novels of this man for whom, in William James's memorable words, "religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever rather"; to whom, in his own words, "the love of a woman to the man who is of no account is a true testimony of what God is in his own heart." They are the records of "The Dark Night of the Soul." They are melancholy, not "because it is easy to be melancholy and the times lack strength"—and who that knows Arthur Hugh Clough or Matthew Arnold would disparage the inevitable melancholy of those transition years?—they are melancholy because he who would be one with God must first wander in a far country. The writings of all the mystics seem to issue in anti-climax. The Union to which they bear witness seems but a meagre recompense for their sufferings. What more grievous story has been left the world than that of Suso, and how inadequate the simple conclusion to it all: "And later, when God judged that it was time, He rewarded the poor martyr for all his suffering. And he enjoyed peace of heart, and received in tranquillity and quietness many precious graces." Mark Rutherford's work, likewise, seems to issue in anti-climax, yet in the occasional intimations of a peace which passeth all understanding, we are given to know that this modern Servitor of the Eternal Wisdom came "*ex umbbris et imaginibus in veritatem.*" It is not by chance that more than one of these records of the "Dark Night"

ends with a daybreak, a daybreak like that to which Miriam rose very early, on the first morning of her soul's peace.

"It poured with rain during the night. Miriam lay and listened, thinking it would be wet and miserable on the following day. She dropped off to sleep, and at four she rose and went to the window and opened it wide. In streamed the fresh south-west morning air, pure, delicious, scented with all that was sweet from fields and woods, and the bearer inland as far as Cowfold of Atlantic vitality, dissipating fogs, disinfecting poisons—the Life-Giver.

"She put on her clothes silently, went down stairs, and opened the back door. The ever watchful dog, hearing in his deepest slumbers the slightest noise, moved in his kennel, but recognized her at once and was still. She called to him to follow her, and he joyfully obeyed. . . . She paced about for a little while, and then sat down and once more watched the dawn. It was not a clear sky, but barred toward the east with cloud, the rain-cloud of the night. She watched and watched, and thought after her fashion, mostly with incoherence, but with rapidity and intensity. At last came the first flush of scarlet upon the bars, and the dead storm contributed its own share to the growing beauty. The rooks were now astir, and flew, one after another, in an irregular line eastwards black against the sky. Still the colour spread, until at last it began to rise into pure light, and in a moment more the first glowing point of the disc was above the horizon. Miriam fell on her knees against the little seat and sobbed, and the dog, wondering, came and sat by her and licked her face with tender pity."